

SHOULD THE MEDICAL LIBRARY BE A TEACHING INSTITUTION?

By COL. HAROLD W. JONES
Librarian, Army Medical Library

IN THE LAST FEW YEARS and during his present tenure in the Army Medical Library the Librarian has often discussed the possibility of utilizing the great resources of the Library in some form of teaching. Beyond a few lectures and talks by the Librarian to classes of the various Army and Navy Service Schools, such as to the Army Medical and Veterinary Schools, the Naval Medical School, and an occasional medical school class, there has been no attempt to develop the subject. The talks given were informal and rudimentary and were confined mainly to acquainting the students with the scope of the collection and the method of using the *Index Catalogue*.

It is not intended to provide the answer here but perhaps there is justification in putting into print some of the ideas which have lain dormant for several years, in the minds of the Librarian and the staff of the Army Medical Library. Considering that the Army Medical Library is Federally supported, what are the possibilities for its development as a teaching institution?

Before we can profitably discuss even briefly, the rôle which such a library as this can fill in the domain of teaching, we should keep clearly in mind that libraries except in the occasional instance are not to be thought of merely as depositories of books, or as documentation centers. They should be agencies for the dissemination of knowledge and for the education of the community which they serve.

In the case of the Army Medical Library which serves the nation as a whole the community includes many members of professions outside that of medicine and any teaching activity necessarily must be organized to include all categories of professional men. For the purpose of consideration the Editor of the *Index Catalogue* and I believe that any organized teaching should include at least four divisions or classes. Naturally no tuition fee could be considered and instruction would have to be voluntary, the members of the staff giving instruction either on their own or on Government time and without compensation. Again the instruction necessarily would be given with the understanding that the orderly operation of the Library should not be interfered with.

As we see it, the teaching could be given according to the program as follows, no schedule of hours being considered.

1. A post graduate training course in *medical librarianship* for young graduates of accepted library schools.

2. A seminary type of instruction in *reference methods* of medical literature for medical officers of the U. S. Army, Navy, Public Health, and possibly other physicians or medical students interested.

3. Weekly or semi-monthly meetings and informal talks on *recent advances in medicine* as found in the extensive current acquisitions in the Library, for members of the medical and allied professions.

4. Lectures at certain times but not too frequent, on *popular medical topics*, for the laity.

No attempt is made here to elaborate any details of the proposed instruction. Neither has any consideration been given to the teaching of medical history since this is within the province of a university and has no particular place in the independent library. It is enough to recognize the validity of the proposal in its broad aspect or to decide that independent libraries have no business to be giving instruction. There is no doubt that the facilities for such an educational program exist in these great libraries. How are they to be implemented?

The demand for such a program is partly in existence, no doubt, but in part it must be created. For a number of years medical librarians in various sections of the country have been aware of the need of a central training institution where young graduates of library schools could learn the special problems and methods of medical libraries. At present, as far as we know, no such types of special training as are suggested here can be made available. Practically the only bar to the inauguration of this form of teaching at the Army Medical Library is the limitation in space. We have now the material, we can provide the personnel—we need only the building and the actual teaching room.

The need for training physicians, especially those engaged in writing, is felt chiefly by the medical librarians themselves. No university gives to medical students a regular course in reference methods, or on how to use the existing sources of information to medical students. Neither are the "News" and "Abstract" columns of our many medical periodicals suitable means for informing the medical profession of the rapid advances made in medicine. It is therefore reasonably certain that such an educational program as outlined here would be welcome. It seems just as certain that it would be of benefit to the Nation.